

Paul Polansky says the number may be as high as 125,000.

According to Polansky, some 14,000 Romani homes have been burned, including the deliberate destruction by arson of the Romani quarters in Pristina, Mitrovica and Pec. Murder, rape and beatings continue as part of the policy of "ethnic cleansing" being carried out by elements of the KLR.

Among the more recent attacks on Roma is that of 20 February, 2001, when UNMIK police reported four armed men entered the home of a Romani family in Djakovica and demanded money with menaces and damaged a car. On 14 February the body of a Rom was found on the road at Liplja. On 13 February, a firebomb attack was made on a Romani home in the same area, destroying one room.

At Suva Reka, on 12 February, a hand grenade was thrown into the backyard of a Romani house.

Such harassment continues and incidents are being verified and logged each week by the Council for the Defence of Human Rights and Freedoms in Pristina.

Whilst it is the policy of the International Romani Union to insist, against KLR opposition, that Roma have a right to return to the province and receive aid in rebuilding destroyed homes, the fact of the matter is that it is not safe to do so. We have been told frankly by the OSCE that security cannot be guaranteed for Roma attempting to return.

This point is well emphasized by the recent attack on a bus carrying passengers from Serbia into Kosovo. Also, the Roma refugees residing in Macedonia, including those in the Romani township of Sutka near Skopje, although only a few miles in some cases from their former homes in Uresovec, are simply too frightened to even go and take a look.

I therefore appeal to those hearing applications for asylum or refugee status by Roma from Kosovo to consider the situation carefully. Please bear in mind that if refused, they would be returning to a province where they are not just unwelcome but where an active policy of "ethnic cleansing" is still being carried out, despite the presence of NATO and the UN.